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FIREHOSE ☆ THROWING MUSES ☆ CHICAGO BAND SCENE ☆

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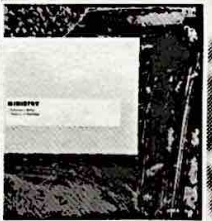
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CHEWIN' THE FAT

The Throwing Muses created quite a stir when they became the first American band to sign to England's highly successful 4AD label. After winning critical acclaim both here and abroad with several ep's and a full-length album, Throwing Muses signed to Sire records here in America. Although still quite young, the Throwing Muses have enjoyed rapidly growing success with their evocative songwriting and musical style. WHPK's Tim McKenna spoke with the band about their songwriting, their history, and their plans.

WHPK: What exactly does *Throwing Muses* mean?
Kirstin: What the name means is that we used to be the Muses, and then David joined, and since he's a guy we had to throw them instead of being them—"they" being female. It means we toss them around which is very presumptuous and obnoxious and I'm sorry that's our name.

WHPK: How did you get picked up by your first label?

David: We made a ten song demo we sent to a lot of indie labels, and the best offer we got happened to be from 4AD, who were way into what we were doing.

Kirstin: Yeah, Ivo, the guy called us instead of Ivo, the secretary like those who called from all the other labels.

WHPK: So you toured in England with the Cocteau Twins (another 4AD band). How did that go?

Kirstin: They're very nice. In fact, our very first show we walked up on stage and played our first set and this big mush came out of the sound system—you know, for some reason it just didn't happen. We got off stage and thought, 'this is it—we're not the Beatles. It's not there.' So we walked off stage and Robin Guthrie eased his way towards us—you know he looks just like Winnie the Pooh—well he stood there for a while and nobody knew who he was at the time, so we ignore him for a while and then he walked up and said, "Hello there, I'm Robin."

WHPK: How do you write your material?

Your lyrics remind me of an Ian Banks novel.
Kirstin: Well, usually the most important thing I can do to any song is to have as little to do to it as possible—just keep my hands out of it and keep my little rhyming words out of it and my song writing tricks because when we first started to write songs we took up the approach most people do of writing in a standardized format and because of this, being so into the music and having so much to do with that you make yourself so much bigger than the music and those songs don't last. The songs that write themselves stay a mystery to you. You discover them and learn more and more about them...They speak the best. I don't do anything—I just make them up.

WHPK: And then how does the band act on that?

Kirstin: They shape the melody and their own parts and it becomes a result.

WHPK: What about musical influences?

Kirstin: We choose to be inspired rather than influenced as far as style goes because our style come out of whatever substance the music creates. I'm not smart enough to stand above the music and say, "We're going to make it fit into this style because the style is important." It comes out of the collectivity of bands' styles, not someone's idea of making the music fit into a certain style.

WHPK: Any favorite bands you like to listen to?

Throwing Muses: X, Velvet Underground, Mission of Burma, Volcano Suns, Pixies, Meat Puppets.

WHPK: Why did you change producers from Gil Norton to Martin Van Hecke for the *Fat Skier*?

David: It was the particulars of the record. What we wanted to do on this record Gil wouldn't really want to do.

WHPK: What is it you intended to do on the *Fat Skier*?

Kirstin: We wanted something straightforward, a lot quieter production-wise. Less busy, more raw...



RIGHT SIDE OF MY FAME



Although Lydia Lunch will claim that she has always been a performance artist, the past few years have seen the final abandonment of her guise as punk chanteuse (perhaps *rauteuse* would be a better word) in exchange for the role she now plays alongside other confrontational New York monologuists as Karen Finley and GG Allin. In addition to her exploration of the monologue form, Lydia is currently involved in a number of side projects, including her association with the band *Wiseblood* and a series of films produced with director Richard Kern.

The occasion for this interview was an evening at Cabaret Metro presenting the abovementioned facets of Lydia's involvement. The program began with the showing of Richard Kern's *Submit to Me* and *Submit to Me Now*, followed by a new Lydia Lunch monologue which led into the evening's finale, a performance by *Wiseblood*. This interview was conducted in the Cabaret

Metro's Smart Bar by WHPK's Rick Wojcik before the performance. Richard Kern served iced drinks and Tom Underberg hung out and provided additional commentary. The discussion's springboard was Lydia's first film with Kern, *The Right Side of My Brain*, in which her need to "feel emotion, to feel alive" leads her to submit to a number of successive rapes.

WHPK: How did you initially get involved with Richard Kern and how did the films progress from that starting point?

LL: I just said to Carlo McCormick, "Can you recommend anyone who does short, nonmusical performances?", since I was trying to get away from music. He said, "Oh yeah, the Blood Boys - Richard Kern and Brian Moran." So he gave me their number and I called them up. In walked Brian Moran and Richard Kern and it just seemed like an irresistible proposition that we began working together. So after seeing a few of their less arty per-

formances, more blood orientated, I decided I should work more closely with them. Then I saw some of Richard's films and I said, "Let's make *The Right Side of My Brain*." We just went and did it in vignettes. I wrote the narration and we just filmed it.

WHPK: So *The Right Side of My Brain* was basically an idea of yours, directed by Richard?

LL: Yeah, but the films are also collaborations. Not totally, but I write the script, pick who is going to be in it, unless Richard suggests some hot new flesh that I haven't happened upon in my surveying of the nation's youth for possible victimization in *Deathtrip* films. We do it the easiest, most concise, and the most collaborative, without confusion, method possible. That's why we continue to do things like this evening, and

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DISCUSSIN' FULL ON

Emerging from the wreckage of the Minutemen in early 1986, Firehose was formed by ex-mm's Mike Watt and George Hurley along with newly acquired guitarist Ed Crawford. Their debut *I.p. Ragin' Full-On* was released last Christmas to massive critical approval. 1987 saw the band involved in heavy touring and rehearsing, attempting to hone their skills as a unit. Presently, Firehose are preparing to let loose with their second album. Recently, Eric Peterson and Bundy Brown got a test pressing from the band.

WHPK: So, about this new album...

George: It's called *If'n*, and it'll be out around Thanksgiving or early December. It's got fourteen songs on it.

Mike: It's on SST Records, SST 115. I guess it's got a simultaneous CD release. *Ragin' Full On* came out on CD too, but I wanted them to wait six or seven months because I didn't know how it would do. I was surprised. A lot of people went out and bought the record. I guess this time they've got enough confidence. I think, in a way, CD's are a way

for the big labels to...well you know, they take up less space in the store, have a higher markup, and it takes a lot more money to make them, so you can cut out a lot of independents. That's why I'm glad SST has them, this way they can't cut us out.

Ed: Mike did some singing on the record, four songs, but he calls it talking. I like it, it's a good rock and roll voice. There's an honest-to-God folk song in there with a special guest vocalist which is a tribute to Elizabeth Cotton, who was a blues guitarist who died recently. She was a really big influence of mine.

WHPK: How did the songwriting workout? Is there a lot of Dos material on this album?

George: Yeah there's an average mix, there's only one Dos song. I wrote two songs, I really just write lyrics, I don't play guitar or anything. My overall contribution is some lyrics and my drumming. Ed took both my songs this time and put music to them, and we worked them out.

Mike: When I first met Edward it was hard, because I didn't know him, I didn't know what to write for him. We all three wrote for this

album, more than *Ragin' Full On*, and that way I couldn't know what it was going to sound like, so I called it *If'n*. "If'n I know...", there's this Bob Dylan song, "Don't think, twice it's all right", that's where I got it from. In a way, my experience with Edward, it's not critical to second guess, sometimes his nerve is enough. So I'm just ridin' with it, dealin' with these 80's. It's different than what I did before, but it's honest, I like it.

WHPK: How do you feel about the new album?

Ed: We recorded it in this tiny little converted house. It's not acoustically perfect, but we still get good sounds. I think the last album sounded really good, and we only spent two thousand on it. People pay that for a video, one video, and we did an entire album, everything: studio time, tapes...

George: It's hard to listen to yourself on record and have an opinion. Mostly what I see is, I notice Ed changing a little more, to where his singings getting a little better, smoother, and the band's coming together. I think it's a better record.

WHPK: When you talk about Ed's voice getting smoother, something that comes to mind is how much smoother his voice is to

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films, and music, and bullshit and etc....

WHPK: Something that struck me about the films, especially *The Right Side of My Brain*, was that you play a fairly submissive role. This contrasts sharply with the position you take in your performances, which is definitely aggressive.

LL: That's because there's many sides to the coin. It's all the same thing. Also, with *Right Side of My Brain*, I was trying to show how the victim was in control, not the other way around. Where my aggression comes from, in any other format, is from victimization anyway. It's the same cycle. It's all about cycles, the cycle of pain and pleasure. That's what I've always concentrated on in all my work. It's all about the same thing: the cycle. Trying to off the cycle. Trying to off the treadmill, or enjoying it so much that you can't get off. The only way off is out. Sort of like Charlie [in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*] says, "The only way out is in."

WHPK: On the subject of aggression and anger, I've heard you say in the past that it's very important to you to be able to express your anger, and that if you don't you'd most likely explode from the pressure. How do you feel about the great mass of people who are denied the means to express their anger?

LL: That's why a lot of people take drugs. That's why there's Ted Bundy and John Wayne Gacy. That's why prisons are totally overcrowded. That's why people mug other people. Frustration is a common denominator that assumes many forms depending on the individual circumstance. I could be out there doing all of the above mentioned things and have or will as times goes on, but I try

therapeutically to make my pain pay. That is, at least I get pleasure by inflicting it.

WHPK: Does this catharsis have any sort of lasting effect?

LL: No. It's not like you had an enema and you're no longer full of shit. That would be great, but it just doesn't happen.

WHPK: Well, do you feel that it can have a reverse effect, say like in the case of the New York performance circuit with Richard Kern stabbing and GG Allin shitting, where the aggression builds in a need to outdo itself?

LL: No matter how aggressive they are, they're still not going far enough for me because I don't see anyone killing anyone on stage or from the stage. Not that I'm promoting that concept, but GG Allin to me, I don't find that extreme because it's so stupid. It's not dangerous when it's stupid, smart people are dangerous. With stupid people, there's no danger. It's too clownish. Anyone can shit, it doesn't matter. Shitting is not a scary thing to me. I'm never afraid when I go to the bathroom. Why does everything have to be so literal? I am shitting on the audience. It's obvious what's going on. Only kidding.

WHPK: How is the monologue becoming an increasing part of your life?

LL: Because the monologue can assume a variety of guises, it makes it more expedient a format to manipulate than musical endeavor. I can do a forty minute monologue politically oriented, or something like I did at the Randolph Street Gallery last month. I can do small, short stabbing things like what I'm doing tonight. I can do even shorter things than what I'm doing tonight, two or three minutes tops. It's more of a variety, more portable, more spontaneous. And it's the same thing I say everyday. I just bring it to the

stage and amplify it. It just can assume a variety of guises. It's more portable. Music, who cares? Everyone's in a fucking rock band. I don't need it. I don't want it. It doesn't mean anything.

WHPK: Would things be different now if you had started out doing monologues?

LL: I would prefer it if I had started off doing monologues because then I'd be a lot further along than I am today. I don't regret doing music. I needed to express what I was feeling and that was just the most convenient format. I wish someone that was seventeen now would be up there doing monologues. I'd love to hear it. I should have started then, but it just wasn't convenient, not that it's convenient now by any means.

WHPK: When you talk about progress, what do you mean? Where are you heading from monologues?

LL: I've only been doing monologues for a few years. First I started with stories which are different from monologues. I don't do stories anymore. I've been able to expand the ways in which I express myself and hopefully expand the emotions I'm trying to express without screaming blatantly, which I will be doing tonight, however. I have to cater what I'm doing to the place in which I'm doing it. But to become more concise in my monologues, which has taken awhile, because you have to get it to the very basics. It's almost like going backwards. It's like Teenage Jesus. It was the most concise thing and precise thing you can do, and that's what I feel like I'm almost at verbally. I'm at the ten year mark, but it's the same thing. It's the same end of the compass. It's just the opposite, but exactly the same.

WHPK: Uh, sure Lydia, anything you say.

Is there much of a rock scene here? Of course. Local bands continue to make little money for themselves as they thump-thump-thump-thump it out in Chicagoland basements and tour from Carbondale to Winnipeg. Gigs at RAD night and Weeds. Recording with Burgess, getting down on vinyl, airplay left-of-the-dial. Big Black is a casualty of Law School. Johnny Machine is now bandless and studying at the AACM down in Hyde Park. *Lake Shore Drivels* still a hit on Magic 104. Bobnoxious are two local boys and a free-jazz drummer from Canada. Says Bob, "We like to go all-out crazy, rock like crazy—a kind of Ramones-style all-out attack." Precious Wax Drippings has recently released their first EP on Downers Groves's own Landmine label. "All our songs are a group effort. I don't know what my brother's lyrics are about, and he doesn't know what mine are about," admits Bill Little. "We're not a political group like the Clash. We're like a cross between the song *Rain* and 1969 by the Stooges. Hardcore has run its course. Kiss? Kiss whales. We appeal to a younger, rocking crowd—not the intellectual desperation scene." Rockin' the cold Chicago winter away. "We're really into the local scene," says Jean Lyons of *The Barbie Army* (read: Barbies Don't Bleed). "We do a cover of Vesta Williams' *Once Bitten, Twice Shy* where we change the words to mention the names of all the women who play in local bands. We have a lot of songs that mention places in Chicago, that identify with a place. We don't sing 'you' songs."

Diva: Operatic Aspirations

Spin Diva was recently formed by Ronna and Victoria of now-defunct Joe for a Night. "We like playing with different guitar players, even for gigs," Victoria says [cf. Nov. Metro gig with Dave Reilly of Big Black]. "When the lead person in the band is a guitar player, songs are written in a certain way and usually, outside of rehearsal. That's why it's so different with me and Ronna, because we play bass and drums and we're the core of the band." Victoria sees a rock-opera in Spin Diva's future, where "we'll have real opera-style singing in Italian over heavy metal." Spin Diva just finished a month-long gig playing a play at the Organic. "We like to keep things fresh," in Ugh!," says Eric, which is why we like to have guest band-

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members sit in." Local House people have called their sound "Industrial Funk"; "I like to think our sound comes out of the environment of Chicago," says Eric, "but it is a little more positive than a lot of the industrial stuff. We don't have any hate/fuck songs. Our music has a raw, noisy, dissonant side to it too, but it's not done in the spirit of nihilism."

Very Pop, Very Heavy

Who writes Material Issue's songs? "I do," says Jim Ellison, going on to announce MI's debut outsoon on Landmine, and another slated for winter release on Susstone. "We're not trying to be a part of anyone else's trend," says Ellison, "We're very pop... very heavy. When people go to see an industrial band, or a noise band, or a dirge band, in the back of my mind I keep thinking they go home and put on Cheap Trick's first album. We have good melodies; it's not a heavy task to listen to us." Green, who came out first on their own Gang Green label, with a second forthcoming on Pravda, are also on CBS/Restless-Enigma's *Ten Best Unsigned Bands in America*. "The reason we chose the name Green is because we didn't want to be associated with any particular type of music. People have said we're 'pure pop,'" says Jeff. "Personally, I think pop is art. People disparage us for being pop or crassly commercial, but I think we've been able to maintain our integrity better than some of the more esoteric bands. Hopefully, there's some substance beyond pure entertainment." Green blues. Just signed to Epic/Grinder after a live show, "It was a one in a million shot. No demo. He said he'd have signed us after the first set if he'd had a napkin," says Lee of *The Slammin' Watusis*. "We play some of our songs as fast as speed metal, but sing the melody at half-speed. Fast Frank is our horn player, and our lead guitarist, Mark Durante, is kinda like Yngwie Malmsteen—fast and metal."

Money Matters

On the issue of what to do if and

when offered a major contract, most of the time the bands just said "We want people to hear us." Though some were more specific: "Friends of Betty Inc. needs big stacks of money," says John, the Betty's drummer. "Tim and Glynnis are into keeping their integrity. To me, it doesn't matter. I'd tell Donnie Osmond he ruled if he gave me a lot of money, and the same goes for Liel Garrett." But Bhang Revival says "We don't have plans of being on Warner's or anything like that; we're having a good time meeting people. We saved up all our money since our first gig and just bought a van with it, so now we can tour." The Ozflish Experience is a two-piece from South Holland that sounds like a whole band. "It's mostly a fucked-up thing," says guitarist Warren. "Our early songs were about stupid things like drugs, alcohol and women. Our later songs are about stupider things, like 'masturbation instead of conception' and 'fascist Americans'. People sometimes say we should get a bass player, but when it comes to getting twenty bucks per gig, I figure it's better to get ten each instead of... what? six-ninety?"

Lori of Bhang Revival goes on to point out that "Since there are only so many all-girl bands, people immediately think we're like the Go-Go's, when we're not like them at all. People are surprised that we're good. People expect us to be bad, because we're women."

Showcasing the Lick

How is it that the band gets its songs written? Does it happen in practice? At home, alone? Baird, of *Eleventh Dream Day* says "When I write a song, it's basically cathartic; I'm just trying to clear my head. If people like it, that's good." How do EDD's songs come together? "We've never written things during rehearsal. I mean, when you bring in a song, you've already worked out the kinks. So, one of us will start playing, showcasing some little lick. If somebody asks about it, we might work on it. If nobody pays attention,

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you usually just put it away and go work on it at home some more." EDD's first EP was released last summer on Amoeba Records. Garage band senza garage? "I think we're a garage band because our influences are garage bands, like the Chocolate Watchbands and the Blues Magoos," says Fang Beach drummer Gary. On their songwriting: "All of our best originals have started out with a simple idea. For songwriting, it's better for us to have at least two of us working together from the start, when we're just throwing ideas around, as opposed to somebody bringing in a song already worked out." Birds at the End of the Road is a burbs band hailing from Lindenhurst. "I think the main reason people listen to us is that we're not a radical change in music, but we're pushing it in a new direction," says Ken. "Our songs usually start out with somebody's small riff that we then jam on for a couple of hours. Dynamics are the real ear-catcher with us."

Hook for Grandma

Naked Raygun writes "short, concise, poppy songs that are really aggressive," says Jeff Pezzati, "It's not like the music is just a means to an end—the lyrics. It's more like there's a drop or a hook or a catch, and you say 'that's my favorite part of the song'. We try to keep things incredibly simple, so even your grandma could get off on it." You can get her Raygun's latest single *Vanilla Blue*, released in synch with the holiday season. And King Rooster of Northwestern's power three-o'urge Overkill, responds—"I always love a good hook, but sometimes a hook puts you at a distance from a tune. A hook doesn't have to be safe, it can be sick, and then it's cooler." Nate, also of UO goes on: "We want to take people on a real ride, a trip. A lot of bands don't deliver a ride. We like to go somewhere with one song and somewhere else with the next, rather than trying to perfect one sound." "We have the biggest sound in the city," says Vince of Price of

Priesthood, "We have both a drum machine and the best drummer in town. We're dark, but not satanic or demonic."

Cold Tuba

The Service are the probably the most enterprising band in Chicago, running both the Pravda label and record store, which are owned by band-member Ken Goodman. "We are also the only band in town with a tuba" says bassist Gary, who used to play in the University of Iowa Marching Band. "That's the biggest band I was in before the Service." Like a lot of local bands, the Service has some following in Winnipeg, a logical stop on any tour up north (especially if you want to be an international act). "When you first start out, your going to Canada in January, when it's 26 below. My goal is to always tour south in the winter." The Service heads out on its first deep-south tour this November.

"They're not just another 'I love America' band," says Souled American's manager Dave. "America is too complex to simply love or hate. They draw on a lot of different roots: American folk music, that's what it is, man." SA's sound has been called 'swamp music' by some, although John of FOB says "There's nothing swamp about those guys. They're like... syrupy country."

Social Message?

Most bands, if you ask them "What's the music about?" immediately thought this is a question about the band's political message or lack thereof. Most of the bands eschewed any outright social purpose, calling it instead 'personal politics' or invoking the non-verbal message of plain hard-rocking. The Leeches, however, are indeed a self-proclaimed "socially conscious" band. "We don't write any love songs," says Dave. "One of our band favorites is Clinton Kweisi Johnson, because of the way he gets the music and political message to go together. With our music, we want to get people to look at more than one side of issues. Like one thing the

band is pretty concerned about these days is the recent spate of racist attacks on American college campuses. We want people to be more open-minded." The charitable Leeches have played many benefits, including shows for No More Censorship and Amnesty International. Mike of *Straightjacketbazooka*, an ad exec, says his songs are often construed as political, but they're actually corporate. "Like *Long Pig*, which is the euphemism for cannibalized human flesh—it's about politicians who rip us off, but it's probably mostly about my landlord." Straightjacket's debut vinyl will be out this January on White Records. "We like to write songs about characters," says Andrew of Tribe, "like Tom Jode from Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*. We have a song about Tom Jode, who ends up as a bum on Belmont Avenue, chewed up and spit out by America," like Horatio Alger gone backwards. Tribe has one record out on its own Wampus Records. "We like rhythmic difference. Our drummer plays radically different beats that give us a sort of lopsided tribal sound. Everyone in the band plays some percussion."

US99 to BMX

The Farmers have put out three cassettes since, including last December, their red, blue, and yellow tapes. "We take pride in our songwriting," says vocalist Paul Crayton, "and we've mellowed out in the studio. We were thinking our second tape had whipped some people's asses, so we were trying to make this one as accessible as we could. We want to have cross-charts appeal—like from US99 to BMX." How do you make your message accessible? "I'm attempting to make people listen instead of just hear," says Lydia, vocalist of the poet/musician duo, *Algebra Suicide*. "I write first before I put anything to Algebra Suicide. When you put a poet up there naked, people tune out. Music makes the words more accessible. On the other hand, the words give the music that extra push you need to get people's attention."

What's in our city? Boom-boom-boom-boom in our basements. Buy the platters, hear the gigs. Help lug the amps. Support Chicago rock, and it will rock you. It can, at least.

—compiled by Gideon D'Arcangelo



Mike Watt of Firehose

FIREHOSE FROM PAGE 9

start with, opposed to D. Boon's. George: Oh yeah, sure I miss D. Boon and all, but I wouldn't want to put another D. boon up there, it wouldn't work very well. Sure it's refreshing to have a change and Ed's a lot younger than us, five years, and he's listened to a lot of different music. But I like the new thing, it's a different band now, and we're really working it with our hands to bring it out. Mike: Ed's voice is different than D. Boon's, it's like that REM guy's. But I've got the same attitude, D. Boon's voice was just different, he was a mountain man, he couldn't sing like that, all in his nose, he just had to belt it out. WHPK: How does the difference in your listening preferences affect your working together? George: It's funny because Mike really bends his ear on some of that stuff. Well you know, Ed is into U2, and the Rolling Stones, and sure I like that stuff, but Mike's more highly opinionated. It's kind of like three different gears. You don't want to make it all one gear, you want to keep that difference in sound. Ed's songs sound nothing like Mike's. I kind of see him as a James Taylor type guy. He was a big acoustic guitar player. Like on

the last album he did "This...", and he's got another acoustic song on the new album too. WHPK: Are you doing this whole tour with Slovenly? Mike: That's right, on this tour, the James Worthy Tour, we brought Slovenly. They were on New Alliance, a label D. Boon and I created, and now they're on SST. You know, Black Flag, when they first started they took us on tour, and our first Firehose tour was with Sonic Youth, and then we went to Europe with the Bad Brains, so we'd like to extend that spirit. Last time it was DC 3, and now Slovenly, next time we want to bring Brother A. West, the world salvation ministry. He's been doing artwork for Bob Dylan, Tom Petty, and now Bryan Adams. He also did the Neil Young concert ad, he's been on MTV. WHPK: Moving up I guess. Mike: Or down, I don't know, MTV's a weird way to move. We've done a thing, we let these french TV guys film us doing "Brave Captain". We went up on top of this bunker we practice in, and they want us to plug our guitars in, so I say "No we're gonna lip it", and we're up there and we've got our guitars out, and this little gun thing behind us, and we're faking the song. We gave it to MTV, and it

made their new wave ghetto. See, when we did that Picnic thing, either you made it onto TV with the Van Halens, or you didn't. Now they've got this new wave ghetto so they can still wear their credentials on their sleeve, while they give you an hour or two on Sunday night. And you're in there with these recycled musicians with their funky names, and their super 8 cameras so it looks real low budget, but then at the end of their video you see "Capitol" or "Epic", because underground's a market. You know, punk rock means something, just getting up there and playing, that means something, but this 'underground and we're winning because we're wearing black clothes..."

WHPK: So how do you like the way the video turned out?

Ed: I liked it because it looks like the very early MTV, like when they just started broadcasting. I remember the Police's "Roxanne" video, just them sort of standing there, no cords or anything, it had that feel. And it didn't cost us a dime and we're capturing the same audience.

Mike: George's cousin came out from Connecticut after getting a degree, and wants to shoot a video for us. So we get together, and we listen to him, but this video's got all these corny things in it. We've got Ed in a straightjacket and this young girl comes over and bursts this globe of red plasma all over him, and then he drifts off with her. So we ask this guy "Hey what's up?", and he's like "You want to get on MTV?", and that just made me more angry. I'm glad we ran into these french guys, with their honest thing, even if it was a bit corny, home films and all that. And you know something, more people will see that, than hear your record. So you've got this responsibility, you don't want this red globe and all this plasma and the girl, and this is George's family here, and we have to say no.

WHPK: Have you been working at all on Dos?

Mike: Dos was supposed to be open tonight, but our agent fucked up. We've been doing pretty well, sold about 2800 albums, and we're doing another one. It was the only thing I was really doing, we started right after Three Way Tie for Last. Dos really isn't rock and roll, it's different.

Kira: On the last album I was still living in Connecticut, and we'd send these tapes back and forth. It was real difficult to work out. The new album will be more intricate, more cohesive, plus there's more singing.

Mike: Before, she had to go to Yale. That's why I did the Sonic Youth thing, before Dos. You know, the way Lee did that was, I'd start playing and he'd say "here comes a rain-storm" and "now the suns coming up" or "here comes a car crash", and I'd play to what he said. Then he spliced it all together and made "In the Kingdom" on Evol. Then we did the Madonna thing. Then Dos, and Dos is weird to do in front of these young people with a lot of energy, it's a real challenge, 'cause you can hear everything they're saying and you've got no crutches. And then this kid came to my house.

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LEARNING TO COPE WITH ROCKET SOUNDS

From Bristol to London and now the States, the distinctive sounds of Mark Stewart and Gary Clail have left many a listener amazed at their technical wizardry. As part of the extended family that also included renowned producer Adrian Sherwood and the famed rhythm section of Doug Wimbish, Skip McDonald and Keith LeBlanc, Mark and Gary are participants in one of the most innovative alternative musical ensembles to date. Mark Stewart & the Maffia released their first lp in 1983, but the new Maffia composed of Wimbish, McDonald and LeBlanc first saw vinyl in 1985. Gary Clail has scored independent success with both solo efforts ('Half Cut for Confidence') and under the guise of the Tackhead Sound System, which also includes the Maffia members. WHPK's Rick Wojcik and Ken Whissoker caught Mark and Gary as they conducted their first tour of the States with the entire On-U Sound crew.

WHPK: How has the show been received?
MS: It's been very good. I'm really amazed at the large turnouts. We run into people who know more about the music than I do. We knew we had some following in New York, San Francisco but we came out to Dallas and found a massive following. There were people who'd been listening to our stuff for years.

GC: We got a response from people who hadn't gone to a show in years. There was a great diversity in the crowd.

WHPK: Is this your first time in America?

MS: No, I came here five or six years ago with the Pop Group. We did two shows in New York, and one in Philadelphia. But this the first time in the heartland, west of Philly.

WHPK: How did you two meet in Bristol?

GC: Well, Mark and I come from different backgrounds. I basically grew up in Borton Hill, a big high-rise block and all my mates



were shoplifting. I've seen them go to prison in Borton. I've been to Borton, it's for car theft and the average thing. I've done a lot of things where I managed to scratch my way through. It's nice to be doing what I'm doing now.

WHPK: How did you do before Tackhead?

GC: Well I hooked up with Mark and his mates. I was going down to these black clubs. They're called blues and what they are is basically these gutted homes with sound systems that the dreads run and they play these dub plates. Mark and I were the only two white kids who could go down there and get away with it. And so, to sort of get over that, I would get up on the mike and sing Irish sea shanty songs over dub plates, and the dreads loved it. They freaked out the first time they saw a white kid able to do this. Well,

one thing led to another, Adrian heard about it, and I wound up on tour with Mark.

WHPK: This was after the Pop Group?

GC: Yeah, this is afterwards. I was warming up the gigs with this thing, a white kid singing over reggae music. A drum track became available after we hooked up with Keith LeBlanc, and I done 'Half Cut for Confidence'. It was an indie hit for me, and it was great because I had moved up to this middle class area and some of the kids had got record deals and it fucking freaked them out when I got this record on the indie charts. Then I put Tackhead Sound System together with all the out takes from all the records we never used. I used to tape all the sessions, jams,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 17

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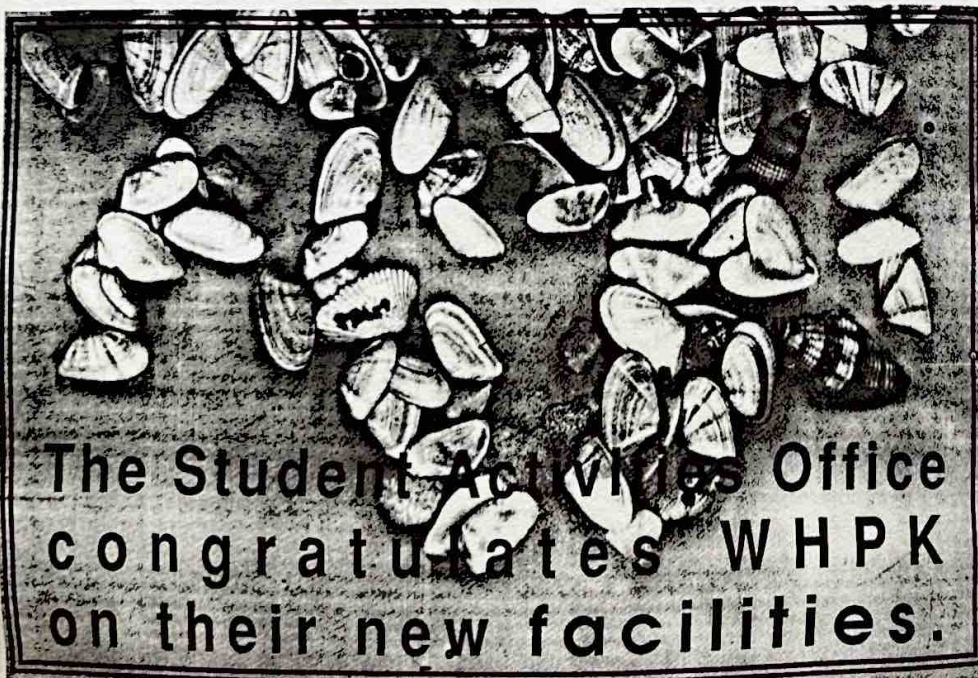


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M.S. & MAFIA FROM PAGE 15

everything. So I went to Europe with the credibility of 'Hard Left' behind me. Me and Mark, as a holiday, would get a rock rig and I'd run like four tape decks with these bass lines, drum lines. I used the album 'Major Malfunction' for a year as the basis of the show. I got four tape decks running and I'd tape what was going over the air and after about forty-five minutes I'd put that tape in the top rack and build on that. It's incredible for me. I'm really proud of the Tackhead Sound System now. All these dj's look at me and they can't figure out what the fuck I'm doing. WHPK: *You don't use turntables at all?* GC: I never use tables. Everything you hear in my show-it's Tackhead, but it's stuff you'll never hear on vinyl. It's just me building up a sound and a way of dance music. I didn't really know what I was doing at first. WHPK: *Were you into industrial noise at all?* GC: Very much. It was bands like that which helped me go on stage when I'd never done that before. I thought that they were so bad with the weird images they project that it made me laugh so much that I thought, 'fuck it they can do it so can I'. I do what I see. That's how I got 'Half Cut for Confidence'. Some bloke in a pub was telling me about how when you drink you do things you'd never ordinarily do. That's how it started. WHPK: *So you toured with Mark in Europe. Were you already hooked up with Adrian?* MS: There were some links with Adrian because he'd done some work with the Slits, this all girl band. The Pop Group and the Slits were like family, because we'd done a record together, we worked together a lot. That's how I knew Adrian Sherwood. After the Pop Group I was so fed up with cynical music types I was going to become a hermit and write books. But Adrian was such a nice bloke, and our friendship turned into what's happening now. WHPK: *He hadn't started On-U Sound?*

MS: On-U Sound was just starting. WHPK: *But you ended up on Mute.* MS: Well, it's On-U, but Mute does the licensing, distributing. Mute was handling it because it's too big for On-U, really. WHPK: *And Tackhead came along at the same time?* MS: Tackhead came along last year, two years ago really. It was Adrian and Doug and Keith in the studio. WHPK: *How did they end up over in England anyway?* MS: We brought them over. There was this London club called the Language Lab in the early 80s, the first rapping club. There were a lot of black kids and fashion people running it. It was brilliant, this first time ever cross between reggae dj's and scratch rappers. A whole new England thing developed, and it mutated into something else. One of my friends was a dj there and he gave me this tape of a drum machine and all these rockets going. It was incredible and so I took it to the studio and Adrian and I tried how they did it so we could copy it. We found out it was Tommy Boy records and that the person was Keith Le Blanc. Well, later on Adrian went to this big music festival in the south of France-like your CMJ thing but in Europe-and his stand was across from the Tommy Boy stand. Finally he goes across and says, "this mate of mine in Bristol is crazy about your music, and he wants to work with some of your lot." Well it was Tommy Silverman he was talking to, and two days later I get this call from Keith, who I've never spoken to, and that was it. It would have been impossible through the various record companies. It was like this psychic link. WHPK: *So then they became the Mafia. Were you recording as Mark Stewart before that?* MS: No, I was recording as Mark Stewart and the Mafia before, but before these American lads we were working with a Jamaican reggae version of the Mafia who did things like the first album. We did a couple of

tours with them. WHPK: *So Keith and the rest had already gotten together. Are you working as a unit just in America, or all the time?* MS: We've been working as a unit. GC: We all have our own things, but we all work together. MS: Gary helps with some of my stuff, I do the Tackhead artwork. We all throw in ideas. We've done two tours of Europe, and this is our first tour in the US. We've all got such different personalities, and the cross-cultural links and the way the friendships have developed is incredible. With all these different inputs it's working very well. It all has a different personality. GC: Yeah. It's the same material, really, but it's mixed and edited in different ways. MS: It's all crossing through. Hip hop crews are starting to scratch with sound effects records and we were doing that years back. That idea will go on to something else. People are really beginning to experiment again-it's the first time I've seen experiments for years. In the punk days, no one experimented. They said they were, but it all sounded the same. GC: I feel one of the things about us, the record companies now have to take notice of us. We're not a pretty band. If you take a look at us, there's two bald people, Keith and Skip, a short fat bloke like me and Mark on stage-we're hilarious. And you also have Doug Wimbish, the flashiest bass player you've ever seen in your life. Record companies see us and they go, "What the fuck is going on with this lot?" It's this group of people who shouldn't be together, musically, and yet at the end of the day our stuff seems so far ahead of everyone else's. I think the future for us is we're going to get colossal or some pretty band is going to work out how we do what we do and make a lot of money off our material. I can go back to scaffolding for a living, Mark can write his books in Cornwall, Adrian can make his dub records and Doug will play with Mick Jagger.

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